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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 004846

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: LEADING SUNNI ARAB SLATE REP ON ELECTIONS, U.S.  
ROLE IN IRAQ

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)  
AND (D).

1. (C) Summary: A leading Sunni Arab coalition representative recounted the Sunni Arab sense of grievance and estrangement from the political transition process, and asserted the solution to the security problem is a "balanced" government (read: more Sunni officials) and "professional" security forces devoid of sectarian bias. While lamenting the "deficiencies" of the American "occupation" of Iraq, he acknowledged USG advocacy for Sunni participation and proposed a process for withdrawal that he claimed would culminate in a positive relationship between the United States and Iraq. He predicted 90 percent of the Sunni community would vote in the December 15 elections, but feared ballot-stuffing. End Summary.

2. (C) Poloff met December 3 with Imad Mohamed Ali, the secretary general of the Sunni political party, the General

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Conference for the Iraqi People. Ali said he was speaking on behalf of the Iraqi Consensus Coalition (Tawafoq), the leading Sunni list, which also includes the Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) and the Iraqi National Dialogue Council. Ali denied that Tawafoq has a religious coloration. Although admittedly the IIP has a religious orientation, he claimed the Conference and Council parties are composed of secular, liberal, tribal and religious Iraqis. Ali estimated that 90 percent of the Sunni community would vote in the December 15 elections. Tawafoq expects to pick up much of this support, although Ali said Sunni tribal leaders would draw support from their respective tribes (e.g., Dulaymi, Jabbouri, and Shammar). He predicted the list headed by Mithal al-Alusi would do poorly, because of his visit to Israel and because many in the Sunni Arab community perceive him as holding them responsible for terrorism following the murder of his sons. Ali said Tawafoq has close ties with Iyad Allawi. While claiming good relations with Barzani, he said Tawafoq calculates that the Kurds will make decisions based on their own interests, rather than the nation's.

Election Assessment

3. (C) Ali criticized the IECI as anti-Sunni. He also characterized the commission as weak, alleging the IECI could not stop inappropriate campaign symbols (e.g., photos of Sistani) and actions to deface campaign material. He complained that the parties were not receiving equal air time on television. He recommended three steps to ensure a successful election. First, describing the challenges voters faced in reaching polling centers, especially in hostile environments like Anbar province, he recommended the IECI permit maximum flexibility in voting location, arguing the practice of dyeing a voter's finger would prevent fraud. Second, he stressed the importance of the widespread presence of observers, especially foreign observers, particularly during the ballot counting phase. Third, he sought reassurances on the integrity of the process of transporting ballot boxes. He said these last two steps would be designed to prevent ballot-stuffing.

Prospects for New Government

4. (C) Ali said the USG must use its influence to ensure the new government is "balanced" and "strong." He claimed the Governing Council and Interim Government had been appointed on a sectarian basis, and insisted the new cabinet eschew this practice. The Sunni community, he threatened, would not accept a Shia Minister of Defense or a Shia Minister of Interior (i.e., the resistance would continue). When poloff protested that a policy of excluding Shia from these specific positions would itself be sectarian, he clarified that these ministerial portfolios must not be held by anybody who acts in a sectarian manner. He observed that the Sunni community supports Allawi, although he is a Shia, because he does not allow religion to interfere in matters of the state.

Views of Sunni Community

5. (C) Ali described a gulf in understanding between the Iraqi and American people. He said the Americans believe

they have liberated Iraq, whereas the Iraqis believe they are suffering from an alternatively inept and brutal occupation. Ali claimed American forces that had reached Baghdad and Sunni majority provinces in spring 2003 encountered no resistance. The resistance developed, he claimed, once it became clear to the Sunni community that they were being excluded from the political process. For example, he said, few Sunni Iraqis even knew Pachachi, because of his age and long exile. (When poloff pointed out that the IIP had been a member of the Governing Council, he said a single seat was insufficient representation of the Sunni community.) Ali said the situation was aggravated by cultural errors made by uninformed soldiers and ineptitude in restoring basic utilities and meeting economic needs.

16. (C) Ali accused the U.S. of "dereliction of duty" through "encouragement" of sectarian policies and an unchecked Shia government leadership. He recounted a familiar litany of complaints, including: the assertion that a Sunni cannot obtain a job in a government ministry; the drop in the number of seats to the National Assembly allocated to Anbar province; and the reports of abduction of Sunni men by Shia-led police who are then tortured and killed. "Have you seen the photos," he asked, "where you can see how they drilled holes into their heads?" He dismissed the view that terrorists dressed in police clothing; he argued that given the curfew only the police could drive around in vehicle convoys at night. The result, said Ali, is that Sunni men sleep at a different house each night to avoid detention. He exclaimed that the maltreatment has been so bad that Sunni men would prefer to be detained by American forces than Iraqi forces. The extrajudicial practices of Shia police in Anbar province, he insisted, fueled the insurgency.

#### Plan for Withdrawal

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17. (C) Ali said the Sunni community recognized that the USG is engaged in a serious effort to promote Sunni involvement in the political process. He lauded the USG for ensuring Sunni participation in the drafting of the constitution; for brokering the amendment package to the constitution; and for reaching out to regional Sunni Arab states. He said he had participated in the Arab League conference in Cairo, and praised the participation of the "neutral" United Nations as well as the final statement.

18. (C) Asked about Tawafog's policy toward the issue of withdrawal, Ali said the issue should be handled in stages. In the short-term, coalition forces should release the thousands of detainees (He claimed that "no one even knows the number") and withdraw from cities. Coalition forces should reduce "excesses" in use of force; Ali claimed his three-year old daughter believes the sight of the American military means she will be killed. During this initial time period, the security services should be transformed into a professional force; under no circumstances should militias be incorporated into the security forces. Ali, who described himself and Tawafog as part of the "political resistance," asserted that the political resistance could convince the "armed resistance" to desist if they could present a withdrawal plan tied to a timetable. Otherwise, he said, the armed resistance would remain active as long as coalition forces were in Iraq, as their goal is to eject them. He claimed Tawafog seeks to establish a positive bilateral relationship between a sovereign Iraq and the United States.

19. (C) Ali solicited poloff's view of the presence of coalition forces. Drawing on the President's recent speech, she noted that many of Ali's ideas tracked with current policy, chiefly the need to develop Iraqi security forces. Poloff described the considerable efforts devoted to this process. She urged Ali to use his influence to encourage Sunni men, particularly in Anbar, to join the ISF. Explaining the United States is conscious of cultural and national sensitivities to a foreign military presence, she urged Ali to be realistic. Al-Qaeda terrorist elements, who are exploiting Iraq's situation for their own purpose, would overwhelm the young Iraqi democracy if left unchecked by coalition forces. The result would have negative consequences for Iraq, neighboring countries, and the United States. She urged Ali to continue his dialogue with the embassy and to introduce us to other prominent Sunni leaders.

#### Comment

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10. (C) This was Ali's first meeting with an American diplomat, and he explicitly sought to confirm that his viewpoint would be conveyed, albeit discretely, to the American government. He agreed to travel to the green zone for the meeting, although he said he was reluctant to enter the area because the continued American "occupation" of the palace is proof that Iraq does not control its own country. When asked about his profession prior to politics, Ali said he has a degree in Islamic jurisprudence from Baghdad

University, and his manners were that of a religious man. He said he had never worked for the government. Originally from Diyala, he considers himself a Baghdadi. At one point he abruptly asked poloff if she was a "fanatical" Christian, and characterized Iraqis as Muslims and Americans as Christians and Jew, but asserted that there could be a fruitful dialogue between the two countries.

KHALILZAD